# Orientalism K

The Aff’s ahistorical conflation of Confucianism with patriarchy represents an Orientalizing western feminism that constructs China as a moral problem to be solved.

#### Taus[[1]](#footnote-1)

But here I am concerned with how Confucius is looked upon by the west and among many ethnic Chinese people throughout the world. Like many things related to China, the image created by modern western discourse reflects deep-seated prejudices. He [Confucius] is cast as either villain responsible for much of China’s ills throughout history or denigrated to the role of inscrutable fortune cookie sayings. But these images are not supported by facts and often not only get things wrong but get things sometimes precisely backwards. There are many myths about Confucius’s views. Many of them so wrong as to be the polar opposite of what the Sage actually believed and explicitly argued against. Defaming Confucius is a tactic that is rooted in much of western discourse on Chinese history and values. It is part of the Orientalist program. No singular person represents Chinese thought and values more. He [Confucius] represents the deep-seated thinking behind the values of much of the Chinese people better than anyone and attacking him is a way to attack the Chinese worldview. In a society that is conditioned to loathe anything Chinese, those that come closest to embodying what is essentially Chinese are the targets of the most baseless accusations. He is synedoche of the Chinese collective soul and by discrediting him, they discredit Chinese culture and everything that China and its people stand for. Even some “experts” of Confucius have fallen into this trap (see [here](http://latrobe.academia.edu/RandallPeerenboom) for an example of one such scholar). Even some ethnically Chinese people during contemporary times who have probably never having even read Confucius, “criticize” him not out of genuine disagreement with what he actually said but out of a sense that it is fashionable to do so. Mao was widely esteemed by his Marxist comrades for his [anti-Confucian views](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucianism#Criticism). Intellectuals such as [Liu Xiaobo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liu_Xiaobo) and a predecessor, [Lu Xun](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lu_Xun), also mocked him, warned against the evils of his influence. Much of modern Chinese cultural criticism from certain intellectual circles revolve around an anti-Confucianism.

Contemporary radical Western criticism is the product of a desire to preserve the singularity of the Western intellectual as Subject. The subaltern becomes the epistemological backdrop against which the dramas of bourgeois subjectivity are played out. They start from the point of enlightened knowledge about the unenlightened Other, presumptuously assuming that if the subaltern were here, speaking, they would be on-board with the movement.

#### Spivak 88[[2]](#footnote-2)

SOME OF THE most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, orthe West as Subject. The theory of pluralized ‘subject-effects’ gives an illusion of undermining subjective sovereignty while often providing a cover for this subject of knowledge. Although the history of Europe as Subject is narrativized by the law, political economy, and ideology of the West, this concealed Subject pretends it has ‘no geo-political determinations.’ The much publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject. . . . This S/subject, curiously sewn together into a transparency by denegations, belongs to the exploiters’ side of the international division of labor. It is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe. It is not only that everything they read, critical or uncritical, is caught within the debate of the production of that Other, supporting or critiquing the constitution of the Subject as Europe. It is also that, in the constitution of that Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary — not only by ideological and scientiﬁc production, but also by the institution of the law. . . . In the face of the possibility that the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self’s shadow, a possibility of political practice for the intellectual would be to put the economic ‘under erasure,’ to see the economic factor as irreducible as it reinscribes the social text, even as it is erased, however imperfectly, when it claims to be the ﬁnal determinant or the transcendental signiﬁed. The clearestavailableexample of suchepistemicviolence is the remotely orchestrated, fareflung, andheterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity. It is well known that Foucault locates epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redeﬁnition of sanity at the end of the European eighteenth century. But what if that particular redeﬁnition was only a part of the narrative of history in Europe as well as in the colonies? What if the two projects of epistemic overhaul worked as dislocated and unacknowledged pans ofa vast two-handed engine? Perhaps it is no more than to ask that the subtext of the palimpsestic narra- tive of imperialism be recognized as ‘subjugated knowledge,’ ‘a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualiﬁed as inadequate to their task or insufﬁ- ciently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientiﬁcity‘ (Foucault I980: 82). This is not to describe ‘the way things really were’ or to privilege the narrative of history as imperialism as the best version of history. It is, rather, to offer an account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one. . . . Let us now move to consider the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat. According to Foucault and Deleuze (in the First World, under the standardization and regimentation of socialized capital, though they do not seem to recognize this) the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here) can speak and know their conditions. We must now confront the following question**:** On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside and outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text,can the subaltern speak?

The alternative is to embrace **Confucian feminism,** where *ren* is the foundation for a relational, virtue-based framework that respects the personhood of every individual.

#### Rosalee[[3]](#footnote-3)

But first of all, let us outline the basic assumptions of our hybrid feminist theory that is Confucian and feminist at the same time. First of all, our Confucian feminism presupposes a relational self situated in a web of relations that are not just external, “add-ons” to some “core” self supposed to exist prior to the external relations. Instead, the self is conceived to be coextensive with the web of relations, which are constitutive of one’s substantial self. And one’s moral worth in turn is measured against one’s practical achievement in sustaining harmonious social relations beginning with the parent-child relation, since it is in the parent-child relation that one first finds oneself in the world. The virtue of filial piety, which emphasizes the reciprocal care between parent and child, is our starting point of being human. The parent is to be affectionate, and the child filial; that is to say, the child must be ritually proper and responsive to the parent’s wishes. Without locating oneself in social relations, one is without a substantial existence, and hence one is not fully personed in the world. This starting point is Confucian through and through, since it is entirely consistent with the Confucian achieved personhood of ren, in which a person becomes a “person” only through embodying specific social virtues that can only be actualized in specific social relations and roles, starting with familial relations and roles. […] Some scholars argue that some sort of basic respect owed to others is needed in ethics in order to deal with an issue such as slavery or the abuse of human rights.5 Most noticeably, the Kantian universal “respect for persons” is taken to be an indispensable ethical principle despite all the criticism of the abstract nature of the person presupposed in Kantian ethics. But if the end is to assert some sort of “universal” principle upon which all people are treated with respect and care, the virtue of filial piety can do a better job than the abstract respect for persons of Kantian ethics. A genuine care for others, not just respect for an abstract person, can be achieved and “universalized” by extending the virtue of filial affection found in the natural relation between parent and child to strangers. This extension is achievable [to] since every person is also a person in the parent-child relation; that is to say, everyone is someone’s father, mother, son, or daughter, not just an abstract person without social relations. The genuine affection that one has for one’s family can be extended to strangers, who are also persons-in-relations. Furthermore, filial care can also be extended to every sentient being that is also situated in the natural relation of parent-offspring. The virtue of filial piety not only asserts the fundamental relatedness of one’s personhood in the world, but more importantly is able to give the Kantian abstract “respect for persons” a concrete content and to extend it from the human world to the world of all sentient beings. Secondly, in the outline of a Confucian feminism, we propose the centrality of the virtue of ren as the culmination of one’s achieved personhood. The virtue of filial piety is the starting point of being human, but a person is also a person in an ever-enlarging web of relations. While family is the focused center, community, society, state, and the world at large are the extended field of the relational self. Or, if you will, family, community, state, and the world at large are a series of concentric circles. The self is enlarged as the circle of one’s concerns and relations is enlarged. The circle of concerns for one’s family is not perceived to be separate from or in conflict with one’s concern for the state or the world at large. As argued earlier, the private virtue of filial piety is not a separate virtue from political good; instead it is the building block, the foundation upon which the actualization of extended public good depends. In other words, Confucian ethics assumes the priority of the family, and familial virtue as the necessary condition for the actualization of public virtue. An unfilial son/daughter is also an untrustworthy subject, and one way to ensure the harmony and longevity of the state is to groom trustworthy subjects by grooming filial sons/daughters. Once the foundation is firm, the embodiment of public good would be firm as well. Or, to put it in contemporary political rhetoric, strong family values mitigate social discord. […] By affirming the virtue of ren as the highest achievement of a relational personhood, our Confucian feminism also affirms a practical ethic without the need for a metaphysical grounding. It affirms the priority of human relations; the community in which one is located must be the starting point, the focused center, and the world at large, the world of the Other, is the extended field where care for others is not just an abstract respect for persons with impersonal laws of reason, but a genuine care with a concrete ritual content. However, the virtue of ren does not give rise to a strictly communitarian ethic in which one’s circle of concerns is limited to one’s community or one’s family. Instead, the ethic of ren acknowledges the priority of meeting the needs of one’s community as the starting point and at the same time stresses the need to extend that genuine care for one’s own to the world of others. Hence, taking the virtue of ren as the ethical ideal, our Confucian feminism is able to, on the one hand, address[es] the feminist need for a concrete morality taking human relations as the priority, and, on the other hand, is able to meet[s] the ethicist demand for a “universal” ethical principle to ensure some sort of basic “human rights,” or a sense of “justice” and “fairness” owed to a person as a person without qualification.

This breaks liberation out of the colonial East-West paradigm and reconstructs Confucianism as the starting point for a dynamic, transnational feminism – one that fosters a culturally sensitive critique of the social situation of Chinese women without resorting to a total rejection of their Confucian root.

#### Rosalee[[4]](#footnote-4)

In the end, this project eventually is personal. Like de Beauvoir, who wrote The Second Sex in order to answer the personal question of what it means to be a woman, I am trying to answer to myself what it means to be a Chinese Confucian woman. Through the eye of Western feminism, I see my own reflection as an Other. The tension between being a feminist and being a Chinese is a tension between the need to form a universal sisterhood where all women are assumed to share some sort of common roots of oppression and the need to substantiate and affirm my own cultural identity that in turn dissolves the assumed commonality among women across cultural boundaries. As a feminist and as a Chinese, I am trying to resolve such a tension. At the same time, I feel compelled to prioritize my own cultural identity, since I am lost in a theoretical space where women exist as ahistorical, acultural beings. In that abstract theoretical space, Western cultural assumptions, however, are privileged in transnational feminist discourse. That privileging of Western ethical theories in turn [This] makes it impossible for me to be a feminist and at the same time a Chinese whose substantial identity is rooted in the larger, cultural framework of Confucianism—the emblem of Chinese high culture.

# Frontlines

Just because their authors are Chinese doesn’t absolve them of the critique – a few reasons:

1. Reading Chinese authors without fully understanding their personal or cultural contexts dehistoricizes them in service to orientalism, covertly disguised as liberal feminism.
2. Name-dropping the ethnicity of the authors as substitute for real structural understanding or analysis is the worst form of token representation.
3. Even if their Chinese authors side with western feminism, you should err neg because academia structurally makes academics of color more prone to assimilation and self-loathing – even if they have more evidence, that represents a **telling absence** that supercharges our link arguments and proves our intervention is crucial in the field.

# Case Answers

Your reduction of the yin-yang metaphor to gender inequality is a Western misrepresentation, grounded in the dualistic paradigm of Western femininity and masculininity. Instead, Confucian yin-yang is based on nonoppositional complements that suggests fluidity of gender roles—turns the Aff.

#### Rosalee[[5]](#footnote-5)

In Western feminist discourse on gender, due to the apparent afﬁnity between the yin-yang metaphor and the modern duality of femininity and masculinity, the concept of yin-yang is seen to be indexical of the Chinese gender system. The receptive quality of the yin and the expansive qualities of the yang are taken as the theoretical ground for the subordination of Chinese women to the patriarchal family structure. But by taking the yin-yang metaphor as conceptually equivalent to the dualistic paradigm of Western femininity and masculinity, one not only imposes a dualistic metaphysics onto the Chinese correlative yin-yang cosmology, but more importantly misconstrues the roots of gender oppression in the Chinese world. For unlike the dualistic paradigm of the feminine and the masculine in the West, yin-yang—a nonoppositional, complementary binary—cannot even function as an adequate theoretical justiﬁcation for gender oppression in China. On the contrary, the irreducible complementarity of yin-yang both in the cosmos and the human body in fact suggests a rather ﬂuid view of sexual difference between the male and the female body and consequently seems to imply a more tolerant view of gender roles in the Chinese world. But in reality, the ﬂuidity of the yin-yang binary contrasts greatly with the rigidity of gender roles in Chinese society.

There is no evidence that Confucian thought was inherently sexist—your arguments are overblown. The patriarchy in China today is not a monolithic structure attributable to a single philosopher—it is the result of intersecting systems of power throughout history.

#### Taus[[6]](#footnote-6)

Allegations of sexism in Confucius seems to be based on the sparsest of evidence. They usually focus on one passage in the Analects where Confucius says that petty people (xiao ren) are demanding and burdensome like women. One would think it would be easier to find other passages had Confucius been the misogynist he is often accused of being. Alternatively, some have argued that the conspicuous absence of women mentioned in the Analects suggests sexism. For example, when Confucius says that all men are basically equal, the absence of any mention of women’s innate moral capacity is sometimes cited as proof of Confucius’s sexism. But as Sandra Wawrytko, the character used for “men” in the original classical Chinese text of the Analects is gender neutral. Moreover, she points out that the one passage used so often as evidence for the inherent sexism in Confucian thought is overblown and taken out of context. There is simply insufficient evidence to argue for any signs of inherent sexism in all the Analects. Moreover, the more ridiculous accusation (due to the anachronism and the complete lack of reference to the practice in the classical Confucian canon) that Confucius is to blame for foot-binding is demolished by Confucian scholars such as [Paul Golden](http://warpweftandway.wordpress.com/2011/12/11/goldins-confucianism/). This belief is silly, not just defamatory, because of the fact that Confucius lived and died almost 1,500 years before the practice first appeared. Ironically, the only mention of the practice in the whole Confucian cannon are brief passages within the Neo-Confucian philosopher [Zhu Xi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhu_Xi)‘s writing where he denounced the practice as barbaric.

1. Melek Taus. “Defaming Confucius.” 25 September 2012. https://blog.hiddenharmonies.org/2012/09/25/defaming-confucius/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Indian literary theorist, philosopher and University Professor at Columbia University, Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, 1988 “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Online, azp) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee. “Confucianism and Women.” 1 January 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee. “Confucianism and Women.” 1 January 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee. “Confucianism and Women.” 1 January 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Melek Taus. “Defaming Confucius.” 25 September 2012. https://blog.hiddenharmonies.org/2012/09/25/defaming-confucius/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)